/46/

Chapter VI. Customs and Practices

1. Birth

852 Twelve days after the birth of a Miao child, his family always holds a "twelfth-day" celebration for him; after a month there is a "first-month" celebration. The family kills chickens and cook meat. They ask a Taoist priest to come to pray for him and name him. 551 The child is usually named "Ya Ta" /Ya the Elder/ or "Ya Erh" /Ya the Second/, etc. There is also a celebration of his first birthday, but the way it is celebrated is unknown to me.

2. Marriage

582 The Miao are generally betrothed when they are about twenty years old. Betrothals are either made through the decision of the 584 parents and the advice of go-betweens, or they are made after a couple have fallen in love and ask the parents for permission and the consultation of a go-between. In the latter case, the parents always respect their children's wishes. According to Miao custom, however, before the formal betrothal, the hour, day, month, and year of birth of the young couple (these are entered in the family registers) must be "compared" by someone who is able to read the almanac well [622 787] (generally a chia-ch'ang). If their horoscopes are in harmony with each other and are not contradictory to those of the parents of both families, they are formally betrothed; otherwise, they must give each other up. Therefore, even if a couple are deeply in love and the match is approved of by the parents, if, unfortunately, their horoscopes are not "harmonious," they cannot marry. Many tragedies of lovers have resulted therefrom. 583 [431] Betrothal presents consist of about 20 dollars (previously 10 dollars or less), three jars of wine, three pecks of rice, and 30 catties of pork. There are two types of marriage: one is the ch'ü-hsi, in which the betrothal presents are 583 given by the bridegroom's /47/ family; the other is the chao-chui 591 /literally, "to call a son-in-law," a marriage in which the son-in-law comes to live in the wife's family/ in which the betrothal pres- 608 ents are given by the bride's family.

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585 stood outside the door waiting for a Taoist priest to perform the ritual before entering the house. After that she entered the house escorted by a woman. In the evening the bridegroom's family also held a dinner to entertain their relatives and friends, and that brought an end to the wedding ceremony. After the wedding was over, the two bridesmaids were each rewarded with 300 cash and three catties of pork. The cash was given by the bride's family and the pork by the bridegroom's.

On the morning of the third day, the new couple went back to the bride's home; but on the fourth, they went over to the bridegroom's home again and returned to the bride's home the day after.

585 Thereafter, the bridegroom remained in his wife's home and became
608 a member of her family, sharing all the privileges and obligations. After the death of his parents-in-law, he may either move away from his wife's family with his wife, or change his surname to that of his father-in-law so that he becomes a member of that family forever.

585 I did not have the opportunity to observe personally the manner in which the wedding of the ch'ü-hsi type is celebrated. However, it was said that it is entirely similar to the wedding of the chao-chui type except that the roles of the families of the man and woman are reversed.

587 There is no ceremony when a widow remarries, nor are there any betrothal gifts. When they decide to be married, the man merely furnishes a chicken, which they eat together, and the marriage is concluded.

There are some additional points worth noting about marriage among the Miao.

582 /51/ (1) Those who have the same surnames are not allowed to marry one another. However, if they are sure that they have no particular blood relationship but simply have the same surname, the marriage is sometimes permissable.

(2) The average age to marry for either sex is about twenty.

585 (3) The Miao people avoid getting married in the third month of the lunar year, when the cotton flower and a plant called toon

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M 593 618 if it is qualified. On the other hand, the observations of the author named (2) agree with my data concerning the position of

2. Page 169.

the woman: "The parents' authority over their sons ends only at death, over the daughters on the day of their marriage. Even if the married daughter were to commit a crime, it would not be permissible for the parents to punish her, nor would they be responsible for the deed of their daughter."

A 884 As among the Meau, the thirtieth year as the attainment of a man's majority also plays an important role among the [574] [556] [782] Akha. It is therefore celebrated. Rich people slaughter several pigs on this occasion, and the guests, usually relatives and friends, are also served rice and liquor; among poor people everything is done on a correspondingly smaller scale. No M [884] sacrifices, however, are offered in connection with the coming-of-age celebration.

A [589] Among the Akha the girls are regarded as being of age at the time of their marriage, and an unmarried girl is treated as a minor as long as she lives.

A 591 For the most part among the Akha, too, the married sons live in the house of their father for several years, although they are allowed to stay in a small sleeping house for the night (cf. the chapter, "Life in the Community," section on "Courtship and Betrothal"). Sometimes they may even build a house of their own immediately, but with the consent of the father. A [589] [884] The unmarried sons remain in the paternal home until they reach their majority, but there are also exceptions, for the father may permit an unmarried son to make himself independent even before he comes of age.

M 597 ●608 Aside from natural kinship, kinship through adoption or blood brotherhood is recognized among the Meau.

AKha A04
Miao AE5

/33 cont./

A 597 A [435] Among the Akha for the most part children are adopted only after they are able to eat, since only at this age is there any guarantee that the child will not die prematurely. A purchase price of about twenty rupees is paid for a boy and about ten for a girl, with which all the formalities are settled once and for all.

M ●608 M [273] Blood brotherhood among the Meau is entered into only by men who are devoted friends. Only the free will of the participants is decisive in this case. If two men have agreed to enter into blood brotherhood with each other, a chicken is slaughtered by cutting its throat. The blood is collected in a bowl, mixed with rice spirits (liquor distilled from rice), and drunk in equal portions by the two men. /34/ To seal the blood brotherhood a formula is used by each of the two participants, which in free translation runs as follows: "We are friends. If I become rich, you will too; if I become poor, the same will happen to you." Then both go to the altars in their houses and burn some of the chicken blood which they have sprinkled on paper that is prepared for this and similar occasions. While it is burning, they call on the supreme god of heaven and their ancestors and ask that their sacrifice be accepted and that the blood brotherhood concluded between them be heeded.

M [776] [782] The rights of blood brotherhood are quite extensive. From now on the two are regarded as brothers by the others and share all their possessions with each other, help and support each other in every way. On the other hand, they are not entitled to inherit like actual brothers, and neither has any right to the wife of the other.

A 608 572 The Akha do not have blood brotherhood, just "friends," without any special rights and duties.

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851 787 Meanwhile the shaman has finished his conjuring, seizes the chickens, and cuts them up in order to examine the omens (see the chapter, "Religion and Magic," section on "Magic, Soothsaying, and Interpretation of Omens"). First he takes out the tongues of the chickens and observes the hyoid bones for a long time; then he strips off the skin from the front of the heads and likewise carefully observes it. Finally, he takes the feet of the animals, holds them in the smoke of the incense candles, and also studies these omens. If they are unfavorable, it means that evil spirits are close by, from which the ancestors cannot protect the newborn child. In this case, the shaman must first drive away the evil spirits, and then the whole ceremony must be repeated. If the shaman discovers that only part of the ancestors have appeared, the conjuration must be performed again in the same way at the end of the month. This is repeated until the omens are favorable.

851 ●608 If the omens are favorable, however, as in this instance, the sponsor steps forward, and the child's mother addresses him as follows: "May my child one day be as great and powerful as you are." If the sponsor has special characteristics, they are also appropriately mentioned. The sponsor now ties a piece of string first around the right wrist and then around the left wrist of the child. This is supposed to protect the newborn [789] child against evil spirits and at the same time signifies that the sponsor assumes the sponsorship. With the same piece of string one of the child's wrists is tied to his own, whereupon he makes a little speech in which he expresses his good wishes for the child and promises to fulfill his duties as a sponsor. Then the sponsor hands the mother the first clothing for the child or silver amounting to the price of the clothing so that it can be bought by the parents. A modest festive meal in which all those present, including the shaman, participate, concludes the ceremony.

The completed ceremony means that the sponsor will always receive the child /54/ in his house whenever he visits him, and that he will help him as much as he can. Conversely, the same obligations are incurred by the child toward the sponsor. The children of distinguished persons sometimes have two sponsors.

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During my visit to the Meau village of Nam Fa in northern Thailand I was asked by the Meau Tua Sen Kun to assume sponsorship for his newborn son (1). I was told that it

1. Bernatzik, IV, pp. 188 ff.

was regarded as an auspicious omen that I, a powerful foreigner, was present in the village at the time of the birth.

551 As names for boys those of famous ancestors are preferred on the ground that boys continue the family. The child may also be given the name of the sponsor. For girls one chooses at will a name which, like all names, has a special meaning. A sharp distinction is made between names for boys and those for girls.

	Names	Meaning
Boys:	lū	pure
	pǎu	surety, guarantor (2)

2. Cf. the chapter, "Law and the Administration of Justice," section on "Property Law."

	tsü	has everything
	fö	to have many children to care for him
	tsǎn	to grow
	pǎn	to flourish
	tsuń	bud
Girls:	tsǎy	slender
	yí	round
	ltsǎy	fearful
	tsǎ	plain
	mǎy	good
	ltsǫ́a	green leaf

AKha AO4
Miao AE5

/78 cont./

A M 596 A M [595 608] A M [614] A M 855 596 M [595] A [603] A M 868

a son has built his own home does he himself come to enjoy the rights of a head of a family. It has already been explained in detail (chapter on "Social Organization," section on "Family Units") that this position is never abused. It is obvious that along with the head of the family his chief wife has a decisive part in the rearing of the children. Only the sponsor has some rights with regard to the children (see "Naming and Admission into the Family Community," in this chapter), but he, too, must defer to the commands of the father or head of the family. On the other hand, the sib from which the mother comes after her marriage, does not have the slightest right or obligation concerning the children (see the chapter, "Social Organization," the section on "Organization of the Family").

Among the Meau, the rearing of the children is in general first of all incumbent upon the head of the large family and his chief wife, and only secondarily upon the parents of the children. Among the Akha, on the other hand, the rearing is primarily the business of the parents, while the grandparents merely help. The care of the small children, as well as the rearing of the girls, is chiefly the task of the women; the rearing of the boys, that of the men (Ill. 63).[1] I also saw fathers, however, who spent hours with their two- and three-year old daughters, letting them ride on their backs and romping about with them. In one case, a little Meau girl began to cry inconsolably when the head of the large family, in this case the grandfather of the child, took up his rifle, for the child knew that he was about to go hunting, which meant a separation of several days.

The basis of child-rearing among both the Akha and Meau is to have examples imitated (Ill. 64).[2] There are only a few difficult and complicated work procedures, such as forging, tool-making, the working of precious metals and the making of weapons, hunting of big game, the preparation of opium, weaving -- and among the Meau all the processes connected with batik work, especially the design of the patterns -- which cannot be learned automatically in play. They require precise explanations and detailed /79/ instructions, and from the start the parents show an indefatigable patience and good nature and constantly endeavor to point out to their pupils their mistakes.

1 [see out 116, p469 - ANALYST]
2 [" " " p470 - "]

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584 marriage /99/ proposal is accepted, the young man and his family go to the bride. There a celebration lasts all day and all night. Then they all go with the bride to the village of the young man."

When the villages are small and far apart, as they are particularly in the case of the Meau settlements in northern Thailand, which makes it difficult for the young man to find [648] a bride himself, one turns to a Chinese trader, and he serves as go-between, for which he is paid a special remuneration (see the present chapter, the section "Dissolution of Marriage," and the chapter, "Trade").

572 584 608 Moreover, child betrothals are also customary. It happens, especially among blood brothers or friends, that they decide to strengthen these bonds still more through a marriage of the children. This decision is often made when the children are still small, often soon after their birth. For confirmation, the father of the little groom sends a silver ring of the value of one silver piece to the father of the little girl. This child betrothal, however, does not force the young people to marry for the principle holds good that no one can be forced into marriage and the young people themselves should come to an agreement on this question. If later, for instance, one of the 572 584 608 614 686 partners of such an early betrothal refuses to honor the marriage promise given by the father, the latter arranges for a plenary assembly of the sib members, at which women as well as men participate. He presents the case, and the sib almost always decides to release the young people from the promise of their fathers. But even if the opposite decision were reached, the betrothed can still insist on their refusal. If it is the groom who refuses, no indemnity has to be paid; if the girl refuses, however, three pieces of silver have to be paid to the rejected bridegroom. One can designate such child betrothals as rare 184 584 among the Meau of Thailand, whereas Savina (1) reports from

1. II, p. 226.

Indochina that they are common there.

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428 596 head who succeeds the deceased takes them into his house upon the now ensuing dismemberment of the large family. Moreover, all the possessions of the large family are now distributed among the occupants of the house up to now; therefore the sons who are already independent and own their own houses receive nothing. Blood brothers of the deceased likewise cannot [608] inherit anything.

428 803 The distribution begins with the cash or silver. For calculating the distribution, a grain of rice is first taken for each piece of silver. Then all the sons who lived with the deceased under one roof, from the oldest to the youngest, receive in turn two grains of rice. Then all the male grandchildren of the former head, again beginning with the oldest, receive one grain of rice apiece. After the youngest of them has received his grain of rice, /246/ the sequence begins all over again with each son getting two grains of rice and so forth, until all has been distributed. Only then are the pieces of silver substituted for the grains of rice (see also the chapter, "Counting and Reckoning").

Then the ornaments are taken up. Only the sons, however, and not the grandsons, share in them, as in the other possessions. Each of the sons, in the order of their ages, selects an ornament; if any remain, the sequence begins anew. The procedure is the same with the other possessions, the animals, the house and the kitchen utensils, and the like. The produce on hand is distributed in equal shares among the sons. Cultivated fields which have not yet been harvested are tilled jointly by the heirs until the harvest, and then the produce is distributed in accordance with the system just described. The same procedure is followed with the property of the widows of the deceased as soon as they die.

428 [562] [422] The female members of the family are excluded from any inheritance, although they retain what was already their personal property, such as the dowry made by them, the ornaments that they received from their lovers or from their father during his lifetime, and the like. Besides the sons of the deceased who are already independent and therefore no [597] longer qualified to inherit, also his brothers, cousins, and other